To the Com of For. Miss
Soc of Reformed
Dutch Church Princeton N.J.

Shanghai Nov 1st 1853

Dear Brethren

I was much pleased last month to receive a letter from your Secy & answer it at once chiefly because I suppose you will be desirous to obtain the impressions of those on the spot of the character & probable results of the revolution now in progress in this Empire. The principal facts of its history I suppose you are acquainted with. That it had its origin in Kwangse. The province west of Canton & first began to attract the attention of the authorities 4 years ago. Their success has been wonderful & rapid. They have increased into a formidable body threatening the existence of the Empire, have fought their way from the Southern to near its Northern extremity ~~of the Empire~~ taken some of its strongest & most important cities, including Nanking wh they have strongly fortified & are now on their way to if not actually besieging Pekin. The name or rather title of their present leader is Ta-ping-wang meaning literally Great peace-king. There is some confusion with regard to the fact whether he is the original mover. It is generally maintained that he is, though for a time the leader was known as Tien-Teh or Heavenly virtue who is said to have been beheaded at Pekin last year. The present leader is supposed to have obtained his first religious impressions from reading a work prepared & circulated by Liang Afa who was the first fruits of Prot. Miss. in China & who still resides at Canton. He is said afterwards to have spent two months with Rev Mr Roberts an independent Baptist Missionary at Canton. He has also had other sources of information as religious books printed by other persons among them Gutzlaffs version of parts of the Old Test. That other religious instruction

has been brought to bear on the leader or his followers is not definitely known. It is said there are those in the camp of the insurgents who understand English & have been taught in mission schools.

The above are briefly the only known & insignificant means by wh the religious element has been introduced into this important movement. That it should have been introduced at all & have been made to play so important a part, is a work the praise of wh all belongs to God. Missionaries have had no direct & very little indirect agency in the matter & it is a matter of rejoicing that they have not, as the movement is not only religious but political & aimed at the existence of the present Empire, and with this latter feature we wish to have nothing more to do with it, than the part of anxious & for the most part sympathizing spectators.

Of the character of the insurgents, particularly those at Nanking & vicinity our information is derived from two or three brief visits of foreigners & their published books or pamphlets. The books are in some cases supposed to be the production of the chief himself & all have the Government seal. These books maintain clearly & strongly the unity of God & contain some strong arguments against Idolatry. The Trinity they evidently have mistaken notions of. Though they exalt it above all men & apply to him titles wh it is not proper to apply even to the Emperor, yet as the Son of God they place him one grade lower than the Father. They say however that there are 3 persons but make this difference, (probably in consequence of the terms used for their Equality). The work wh it came to perform is not set forth so prominently as we could wish. It is stated that he came to redeem the world & to save men, but still when they attempt to explain how man is to be justified & get to Heaven it is generally stated to be by keeping the commandments especially the 10 given to Moses & the orders of his prince. Political duties are mixed up with religious & those that die fighting for the state, have ~~those~~

Heaven held out to them as their reward. They maintain strongly the Ten commandments as their code of morals. Opium smoking they include under the 7th commandment & punish it & adultery & stealing by death. It is said however that smoking of opium is carried on secretly even in Nanking. In their worship they have forms of prayers & chants wh are repeated morning & evening & at meals. They also have a kind of offering to God placing bowls of rice & tea for the three different persons of the Godhead on a table or altar. But they have no images or paintings, for they even destroy those of the Romanists. Neither have they any priesthood, but the officers of Govt appear generally to officiate in their religious ceremonies. They observe the Sabbath but by mistake as is generally supposed on Saturday. Their Almanac is one of their most remarkable books introducing a new division in the months & doing away with all lucky & unlucky days wh is one of the most deeply rooted of Chinese prejudices.

What wh. appears the worst in their books is the claim made for direct revelations. Dates names & places are given & the conversation at least in one instance is recorded, wh is said to have been held with the Heavenly Father. It is hard to reconcile these alleged revelations with strict honesty & uprightness. The chief himself alleges that he had remarkable dreams at the time of his conversion & reading of revelations in the Old Test has probably adopted this artifice to sustain & keep up his authority. As an inlet to abuse of every kind & a departure from the written word the course of the insurgents in this respect is strongly to be condemned. Our hope still is that as they learn more of the truth & especially as they become better acquainted with the gospel they will renounce their errors. The future however is very problematical. Instead of wishing to increase their knowledge of divine revelation & correct what in their practice is contrary to it they may become set in their ways & establish a form of religion wh shall be no better than Mohammedanism. Another danger wh besets them is their prosperity - the increase of numbers of

those who do not cordially sympathize in their religious views. Thus those who have arisen at Amoy & this place are members of the Triad Society - a Secret Society formed for the purpose of overthrowing the present dynasty. Its members are as thorough idolaters as any of their countrymen & sympathize with the insurgents at Nanking only in a political point of view. Those here have not been formally recognized by the leader. It was reported that he would only consent to forming an alliance with them on the condition that they renounce opium-smoking & embrace the doctrines of Jesus. If they submit to these terms many of them will have to renounce a very favorite habit. Before this revolution is complete not only will the Tartars have to be conquered but many discordant elements will have to be harmonized - ambitious leaders who have arisen against the present dynasty will have to be satisfied. In religious matters the Chinese would be willing, I fancy, to conform outwardly to most anything - few would shed tears over the destruction of their idols, yet there is a mass of superstition & error which no political revolution can ever overturn & which nothing but the mighty hand of God who has as we trust begun this work, can prevent from being mixed up with it & counteracting & nullifying what truth they possess. It is our joy & consolation that to Jesus our Lord has been committed all power in heaven & in earth & that he will overrule all things for the good of his Ch. To him should we look with gratitude for what he has so wonderfully & graciously accomplished & with earnest supplication that he will continue & perfect what he has begun, that he will lead those who are at the head of this revolution into a more perfect understanding of the truth, that he will open the way for the complete & universal proclamation of the Gospel among this people & that he will arouse them from their present lethargy in regard to eternal things & bring them by his word & Spirit to the blessings & privileges of a people whose God is the Lord. Now is an important & critical period for China & we hope the news from this land will interest Christians & lead them to pray for its welfare.

I had intended to say something more about our position here & what we ourselves think of this rebellion. But I can only do it briefly as the opportunity by wh I wish to send closes this evening & I write amid various interruptions. It is now a month since the Imperial Army came to besiege Shanghai & retake it from those who were only a half day in getting possession. Their attempts thus far have been ineffectual. Soldiers half of whom have only spears & flags & are consequently useless except as a display of numbers march up to the City wall & after a discharge of their matchlocks & a few killed or wounded, march back again. At a respectable from their promiscuous firing I have sometimes witnessed their skirmishing & one can hardly imagine anything more ridiculous. A man will crawl along by some bushes & without taking aim bang away with his gun pointed at the sky & then away he will run to his companions as if he had performed some glorious feat. Before we had any exhibition of this mode of fighting we used to wonder at the large numbers daily reported to the Emperor as having been killed at various places, but after fighting here for a month only one of the insurgents has been killed. This warfare bears hardest on the people. They are driven from their houses & their property plundered by the soldiers who not without mercy take the doors & furniture of their houses for fire-wood. The rebels also have burned portions of the suburbs around the walls to prevent the Imperialists taking possession to cover their attacks on the City. The City Gates are of course shut & the inhabitants residing within the City walls have been obliged to remove & also those living near the walls on the outside. Such a state of affairs, is of course a serious interruption to our work. We cannot get to our chapels in the City & most of the people in the suburbs have fled to more quiet places. Should Pekin be taken it will change very much the appearance of affairs & it is hoped

just an end to what must be to the people a most distressing conflict. If prolonged through the winter many more must die of starvation than by the sword. Thousands of poor in this vicinity who only made enough in peaceable times to buy food to eat have been thrown out of employment.

There are one or two questions in your letter which I am sorry to be compelled to answer very summarily. The 1st relates to remaining in the U. S. after graduating. There might be circumstances which would render it desirable in particular cases & for special objects just as in the case of those settling at home, but as a general rule there is no greater reason for a foreign missionary delaying to enter upon his field of labor, than if he were going to be a home missionary. There is much he can never learn so well as in his field of labor. This is true both of the language & of methods of labor & of the character of the people. Another question relates to what laymen might do. In most large missions a layman could be very usefully employed in taking charge of printing, of building & money operations, which they could manage as well & often better than ministers. They could also be useful in schools. In fact we greatly need men who are willing to undertake the drudgery of school teaching & who shall esteem a privilege to be thus employed. The great difficulty is laymen are not generally qualified to undertake the mastery of a difficult language, & few are found willing to come where they are wanted to take charge of mission presses. It would be a great blessing if among those who come for the purpose of engaging in mercantile operations there were more true Christians. Now & then one comes, & he is a great comfort & assistance to missionaries such was the late Mr. Oliphant. It is to be regretted however that the greater part of the mercantile houses are engaged in the Opium traffic & the profits on which are so great that a conscientious man who will have nothing to do with it

finds himself placed at a great disadvantage.

But I must close this hurried letter, with my best wishes & prayers for you all, that the God of all grace may eminently fit & qualify you to be faithful labourers in his vineyard

Yours truly

P. K. Wright

To the
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[Mr. Wight returned from China in the summer (July) of 1854, with his wife & four children, on account of ill health. If his health is restored, he will return — C. H. M.]